

Monday, 13 December 2003

The temperature is at 13 degrees (Fahrenheit) at this very moment (2 AM). Sunday Raymond saw people walking on the ice before Church. Sunday evening I saw skidoo lights over on the far eastern shore of The River. Freeze up has progressed that far -- which isn't very far; we have a way to go.

CHOPPER WARS...

We are at the mercy of the choppers. And the choppers are -- or were -- having a chopper war. There ****were**** TWO choppers from TWO chopper companies. And they ****were**** in the midst of a knock-down, drag-out battle. The combatants: Expedition Helicopters and Dunn Helicopters.

Expedition is the company that was here last year -- the company that was something less than expeditious -- when their starter wouldn't start for three days running. Dunn, a newcomer, was the intruder.

Despite the competition, bush style, both companies managed to keep their prices at \$30 -- one way -- each. However, there was some pretty good negative advertising -- mostly generated by those partial to Expedition. There have been lots of stories: some false, some true.

For instance: One day, the Ontario Ministry of Transportation called the Dunn company president. They wanted to know why the Dunn never reported a downed (crashed) chopper. The reason was that there never had been a downed/crashed chopper.

However, there is another story, with reportedly more truth: One day, against specific Ministry orders not to fly at all (because of bad weather), Dunn tried to carry a load of parcels across The River for Canada Post. In fact they didn't just take one load; they took two loads, at once -- or tried to. Freight is carried in a giant mesh bag tied somewhere to the bottom of the chopper. This particular chopper was carrying TWO of those mesh bags (full of parcels). ONE of them managed to get loose and fell *****into***** The River.

Supposedly most of the packages were deliveries from Sears -- virtually the entire Christmas delivery. The Island has gone hysterical. Sears is trying to figure out just what DID get lost; and they're trying to get replacement orders delivered before Christmas. But there may have been other parcels lost, as well. I'm now sick with worry trying to figure out if anything sent to me or The Church got lost. If anything was in that load, it's gone.

Dunn has been grounded. Their shack at Chopper Plaza is boarded and locked. Expedition rules the roost -- for now.

Bobby showed up in church last night -- first time since his surgery last month.

The Sunday School Teachers did a skit in church yesterday morning. And brought down the house. Something about Advent. Or Christmas. Or both. The high point was when Nellie -- doing John The Baptist -- appeared in bathrobe, arctic boots, and wool hat knitted by my late Aunt Ellen. I got a picture of that one.

Tuesday, 9 December 2003.

Bobby was back at work yesterday -- and on the phone to me today -- and running at a pretty fair clip, considering what he's been through the past few weeks. And that's at twice the speed I can summon on a good day. Vestry Meeting comes up a week from tonight, and we already have more to chew on than we'll ever have time for.

The Choir, which rehearses every Tuesday night, again invaded the kitchen -- this time with

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pies, brownies, cookies, and cakes. It all was wonderful. I even hauled out the Lapsang Souchang. but it was not universally well received. 'Tastes like medicine!' -- probably because I made it too strong -- as usual. Moose Factory likes it's Red Rose Tea. That will never change.

Thursday, 11 December 2003

Open water was reported on the River yesterday. Freeze up is not going well at all. Snow squalls continue to ground the remaining chopper this morning. Iris and Don came into Moosonee on the train yesterday afternoon -- and an hour late. They were too late to get a flight over to The Island. Choppers don't fly in the twilight. The Montagues are camped out at Holy Apostles' in Moosonee -- Don, recovering from surgery; one elderly cat; one elderly dog; and Iris, taking fits.

Every year at this time Elders (and their families) bring out handicrafts made throughout the year. Lots of really wonderful things are for sale at the Cree Community Center -- where the Post Office and Northern Store are located. When I have money I get what I can and send it to folks in the States. This year, however, I don't have any money; I spent it all knocking my website into shape; and that's my Christmas present to everybody; Merry Christmas!

But there's a way you can get nice things -- moccasins and Tamarack geese and that sort of thing:

CREE CULTURAL CRAFT SHOP
PO Box 56
Moose Cree First Nation
Moose Factory, ON P0L 1W0

Phone:
705/658-4594
705/658-4619

FAX:
705/658-4734

They don't have an easy email or website routine yet. But, I'm told, that will be coming. Cheyenne and John work there. They're knowledgeable and easy to deal with. The prices at the shop are consistent with what's asked for elsewhere on The Island. The handicrafts are from The Island. Really authentic materials, such as home-cured moose hide, are hard to come by. They also are more expensive. But, if you're picky, you can get them.

Friday, 12 December 2003

How fast does news get around Moose Factory Island?

We got a real snow storm yesterday -- the kind they get down south. Usually we get dry cold here; and that means we don't get much snow; and what snow we get blows away -- or around; you just drive over it, and it turns into pavement. But, yesterday, we got snow. Near the end of the storm -- around 3 pm -- I decided I wanted to get the vehicles loose and rolling again. I was not about to wait until Saturday (when the back-hoe comes) to be plowed out. The streets already were plowed by the municipal grader.

I started shoveling. Over the next ten minutes three cars passed by on the street. Five minutes after the third car went by a skidoo with two lads (18-25 years old) and two enormous shovels appeared. They told me THEY were going to clear the driveway -- and that I was NOT going to clear the driveway. They did -- in about 30 minutes. It would have taken me all day and all night.

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Somebody had called Bobby and had told him that the old fool (jbe) was out there shoveling by himself.

On the other hand, things can be quiet. A few weeks ago, now, The Deputy Chief had spoken his mind on the subject of drugs. The Deputy Chief IS the sort that DOES speak his mind from time. (Readers of this Journal may be familiar with others who also speak their minds from time to time....)

The Deputy Chief neither likes drugs, nor does he like people who sell drugs. And he said so. In fact he has said so numerous times. One night, however, somebody shot his house full of bullets. Nobody got hit or hurt. But the Band Chief and Council decided that enough is enough and offered a tidy reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the perpetrator(s).

No information has been forthcoming. Or, at least, no arrests have been made; and the reward remains posted.

Tuesday, 16 December 2003

Ronnie called me this morning. Ronnie is the Principal at the Ministick Elementary School. As of this morning all schools on The Island are CLOSED -- until further notice. There is a case of flu reported on The Island. Restrictions went up at The Hospital yesterday, so I knew something was up. Moosonee is not yet affected by the closing.

The youngest and the oldest are the most vulnerable. And the flu vaccine is reported to be running short.

Wednesday, 17 December 2003

We got another six inches of snow today. It seems that we have already received as much snow this winter as we did for all of last winter. It's still warm -- 25 degrees (Fahrenheit). The River is frozen over, and skidoos are on it. But it will be weeks before heavy trucks will be safe.

It's now 9 PM. The work for the day is done. Since the Schools remain closed (because of the flu) there are a lot of restless kids. One good diversion for kids is a sleigh ride. Only here that means a toboggan tied behind a skidoo. There's one circling the Rectory with about eight five-year-olds -- everyone having a grand time of it.

Saturday, 20 December 2003

It's the Christmas Season. And that means funerals -- here, and elsewhere. Sammy died at 3:30 yesterday morning at The Hospital. Sammy was Bobby's uncle. Sammy's wife and daughter died less than a year ago.

About 25 of us were there with Sammy at the last moments; and we lingered afterwards at his bedside and read the litany.

Sophie had died in Timmins this last Sunday. I conducted a Family Service for her and her family on Thursday night. Bishop Cadieux presided at her burial yesterday and celebrated (RC) Mass at The Old Church. He had trouble getting over to The Island, however. High Tide had closed down the skidoos. Moose Cree Band saved the situation by chartering a chopper.

George had died in Timmins a day or so ago. His body will arrive on Monday's train. Hopefully we'll have the Family Service Monday night and burial before Christmas.

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So often Christmas time brings a mixture of joy and great sadness.

Monday, 29 December 2003

Temperature this morning (at 5:30) is 37 degrees -- Fahrenheit. Much of the snow has melted. It was HOT yesterday, as well. The packed snow on the roads has melted. The surface is now nothing but wet and shining glare ice. (No sand or salt is spread on the roads, because that would offend the skidoosers.) Driving is spectacular!

Over the weekend Elsie was at a party in Moosonee. She returned to The Island in a pickup truck. (!) The River has a foot of ice, at least, I'm told. Cars and pick-up trucks are going back and forth. But I'll wait another week or so, before I venture out on to the ice in a car.

Christmas this year, like last year, was subdued. Two Family Services on Monday; two Funerals on Tuesday. Then, on Wednesday, two Christmas Eve Services. The really happy moment was on Christmas Morning when we celebrated a Baptism in the Little Church.

I had another personal ditch experience on Christmas Eve between the 7 PM and 11 PM Services. I'm building a reputation -- in fact, I've had a (well earned) reputation my whole life. I attempted a Rhode Island U-Turn right in front of Raymond's house. The cleared roadway was more than sufficient for the maneuver. But, what I didn't realize -- until too late -- was that the grader had also cleared the top of the ditch (which was covered with flat, fresh -- and soft -- snow. Down went one of the front wheels. And there I was parked for an hour.

Raymond's house is right where the (Moosonee/Moose Factory) ice highway begins. While we were standing there pondering the situation (and my stupidity) Iris returned from Moosonee (from Services there) with comments. In fact, most of Moose Factory was returning from -- or going to -- Moosonee; and everybody had a comment. Finally a couple a guys helped us out with a push. It didn't take much of a push. But it gave EVERYONE something to talk about.

MERRY CHRISTMAS!!!!!!!